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Radio as a Means for Public Relations

G. H. Gilbert, D.V.M.

VETERINARIANS have, for several years, seen the need for a public relations program in their organizational set-ups. Many of these constituent organizations have gone out on their own to achieve remarkable progress in telling the story of our profession to the general public. Practically all of the veterinary organizations which have accomplished a public relations program have directed it toward the newspapers, either through a professional public relations consultant or by some committee of their own which has seen to it that the press of their area had been fully acquainted with veterinary problems and the advantages which the public can gain by knowledge of a veterinarian's assistance.

In only rare instances have we, as a profession, utilized the radio as a means of telling our story. The AVMA in the recent two or three years has given us some guidance toward this end. But we have only scratched the surface. Some women auxiliary organizations, particularly in the East and Middle West, have done some things to take up this torch of publicity and have, as I understand, in a creditable manner, using the AVMA scripts as a basis for their programs, brought radio publicity on veterinarians to the general public. These efforts have, however, been on a largely local basis and generally relegated to that time of the scheduled program day where paying

customers of radio stations would not be "elbowed" out of more advantageous times.

"Dr. John," an anonymous entity sponsored and endorsed by the Colorado Veterinary Medical Association, resulted in one of the most widely listened-to radio programs concerning veterinarians that has ever been brought to the general public. To avoid a charge of gross immodesty, let me hasten to say that the popularity of this program was due, not so much to the personnel involved, but rather a result of the type of program in which it was employed and the time of day it was heard.

When I first looked into this matter of radio programming on behalf of the Colorado Veterinary Medical Association, I approached one of the larger radio stations in the Denver area with the possibility of using the scripts as they were sent out from the AVMA office. The station management, a little reluctantly, proceeded to set up the necessary procedures for a trial run, using one of these scripts. The particular subject which I picked was one concerned with "The Care of Old Cats."

The recording we got from this was rather less than colossal. At first the station tried to sell this in the commercial channels and I'm confident that they would have made more head-way had they tried to merchandise old cats instead. I believe I'm being very objective when I say that the treatment of the script that the professional announcer and I gave was probably as good as could be done

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under the circumstances. However, the silence with which this recording was greeted around the radio station was awe inspiring.

The instructions that go with these AVMA radio scripts consistently contained the admonition to use the scripts judiciously. Of course, they are written in such a way that they can be used exactly as they are received. However, I would add to the advice given by the AVMA public relations office and say that this material should be utilized for its information value and not as a radio script per se.

By imposing upon friends at this station, who by now were rather wary of their acquaintance with me, I was introduced to one of the better announcers and certainly considered one of the leading radio personalities of this region. It was he who gave me the best advice I have gotten and who started us on what we like to believe is one of the better radio shows on behalf of the veterinary profession.

The particular show with which he was involved was called "Open House." This was a homey, warm, conversational program directed mainly to the housewife. The setting was his kitchen where he discussed various topics of the day, played some records and read a little bulletin board to which people contributed for notices of their various local meetings over the country. We covered quite an area, reaching from the Dakotas to New Mexico, and from Arizona and Utah to Kansas and Nebraska.

When he and I started, we chose for me the name of "Dr. John" because of its commonness and its anonymity. To my knowledge there is no veterinarian living in Colorado whose last name is "John." In this instance, "Dr. John" was the neighbor living next door who dropped in every Friday for a chat with this announcer in his kitchen. Throughout the series of this program, we wove in a little chit-chat concerning the private and domestic lives of the two neighbors. For instance, we had a running argument on who should shovel off the front walk and who was going to borrow whose lawn

mower. This seemed to take away from the dryness of the subject and many of our listeners, through their letters, indicated that they were entertained by the lightness of this atmosphere, as well as informed by the subjects which we discussed. From time to time we offered our listeners pamphlets of a non-commercial nature which they could receive by writing in to "Dr. John." These were such things as "Shaggy Dog Stories," distributed by Prescription Diets, and "Dr. for Your Dog or Cat," a leaflet excerpt of one of the Kiplinger Magazines. These mailings were made for the purpose of determining our listener audience. Also "Dr. John" answered questions sent in by listeners and on every Friday there were several.

Radio speaking is easier and harder than platform speaking. It is easier because you have all the work set down for you. You have no fear of stumbling or forgetting or failing to find the right words or sequence of thought as in extemporaneous speaking. The scripts for "Dr. John" were all prepared by me for each program and, while they sounded very much "off the cuff," there was very little ad libbing. Only occasionally did we say anything that was not on the script, except when answering the letters toward the end of the program. Little physical energy is required. No style and bearing, manner, posture, is necessary. You may sit down, if you wish, in your shirt sleeves and with your collar unbuttoned. Your audience can't see you.

Radio speaking is also harder because it requires you to be something of a writer and something of an actor. The script must be carefully written out. It must sound like talk and yet not be as loose and rambling as ordinary talk. Everything should be natural and yet concentrated and progressive. It should be read cheerfully and informally. To read as if you were just chatting is not easy for most speakers. They fail in what actors and radio people call timing, that is, they do not imitate "first time utterance" well.

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and feels greasy. Dryness of the hair and a fine flakiness of the skin will be evident in about three months but the alopecia, edema and emaciation may not appear for one to two years. When animals are on the fat deficient diet for prolonged periods, they go through cycles in which there is extensive desquamation with almost complete loss of hair followed by a period in which the desquamation is decreased markedly and new hair appears. Changes in the appearance of the skin and hair have been noted with animals both in a temperate and semi-tropical climate and under various degrees of humidity. Severe alopecia and emaciation were not observed in the temperate climate. Part of this difference may be dependent on the previous history of those animals. However, all of the marked dermatologic effects have been observed in a humid climate. In addition to the abnormalities of the hair and skin all the dogs have shown a change in temperament. First, they become very excitable and later tremulous. Some of the animals appear to succumb quite readily to infection.

Young puppies maintained on fat intakes of 1 to 6 percent of the total calories develop abnormalities of the skin and hair whereas when fresh lard is fed at a caloric level of 29 percent (total fat 30 percent), such abnormalities are prevented. Consequently, the curative effect of fat in restoring healthy appearing skin and hair to fat deficient animals was tried at various levels of intake.

The emaciation observed in the fat deficient animals possibly may be attributed to poor utilization of the carbohydrate and protein resulting from the absence of fat in the diet.

Although death may not occur as a result of a lack of dietary fat, marked abnormal changes in the gross appearance of the skin and hair take place. The major changes which developed are characterized by dryness of the skin and hair, desquamation, loss of hair and increased susceptibility to infection. Mortality in the fat-deficient animals was 38 percent. The syndrome was prevented and cured by the incorporation in the diet of 29 per-

cent of the calories as fresh lard, bacon fat drippings, butterfat or crisco (total calories as fat 30 percent). Marked improvement was produced when the fat level was increased to 6, 11 or 16 percent of the calories. However, complete and permanent cures were not observed at levels less than 16 per cent. Incorporation of one percent of the calories as linoleic or arachidonic acid ester also resulted in definite improvement in the skin and renewed growth of hair. This level of unsaturated fatty acid alone was not sufficient to effect complete and permanent cures in a period of six months.

In summary, although the small animal in the United States receives much better nutrition than heretofore, it is proposed that at least 50 percent of these animals are still suffering from various forms of nutritional deficiencies. Much more work needs to be done to supply the knowledge necessary to prevent nutritional disorders in these animals.

End

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They do not give the characteristic pauses and groupings of extemporaneous talk. They read too regularly. The words on the paper just pull them along at a monotonous and usually too fast a rate. I have found, particularly on such a program as ours, that I could more easily simulate ordinary conversation if I deliberately stopped in the middle of sentences and continued with a different inflection in my voice. However, this is a matter to be determined by the individual.

In conclusion, I would like to say that what was done on behalf of Colorado veterinarians can be done anywhere in the United States, and perhaps is already being accomplished in many areas. I have no illusions that what we did here was unique nor is it at all impossible. We make no apologies for the fact that our radio program was not a professional effort. We are extremely proud of the fact that it contributed greatly to the public relations effort of the veterinary profession and brought us much closer to the public which we serve.

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